



An Issue Dedicated to Family

The concept of family is constantly evolving in response to our societies' changing social structures, values and norms. One thing that hasn't changed is that families continue to provide the main framework in which children develop, learn and grow. Many adoptive families face the complex challenge of establishing healthy family roles with children who have experienced complex trauma and therefore do not always trust that a family can or will provide stability. The Post Adoption Resource Center recognizes the importance of family and is dedicated to helping our families grow healthy, healing relationships and to assisting families in building resilient, strong family systems.

Family Is Important!

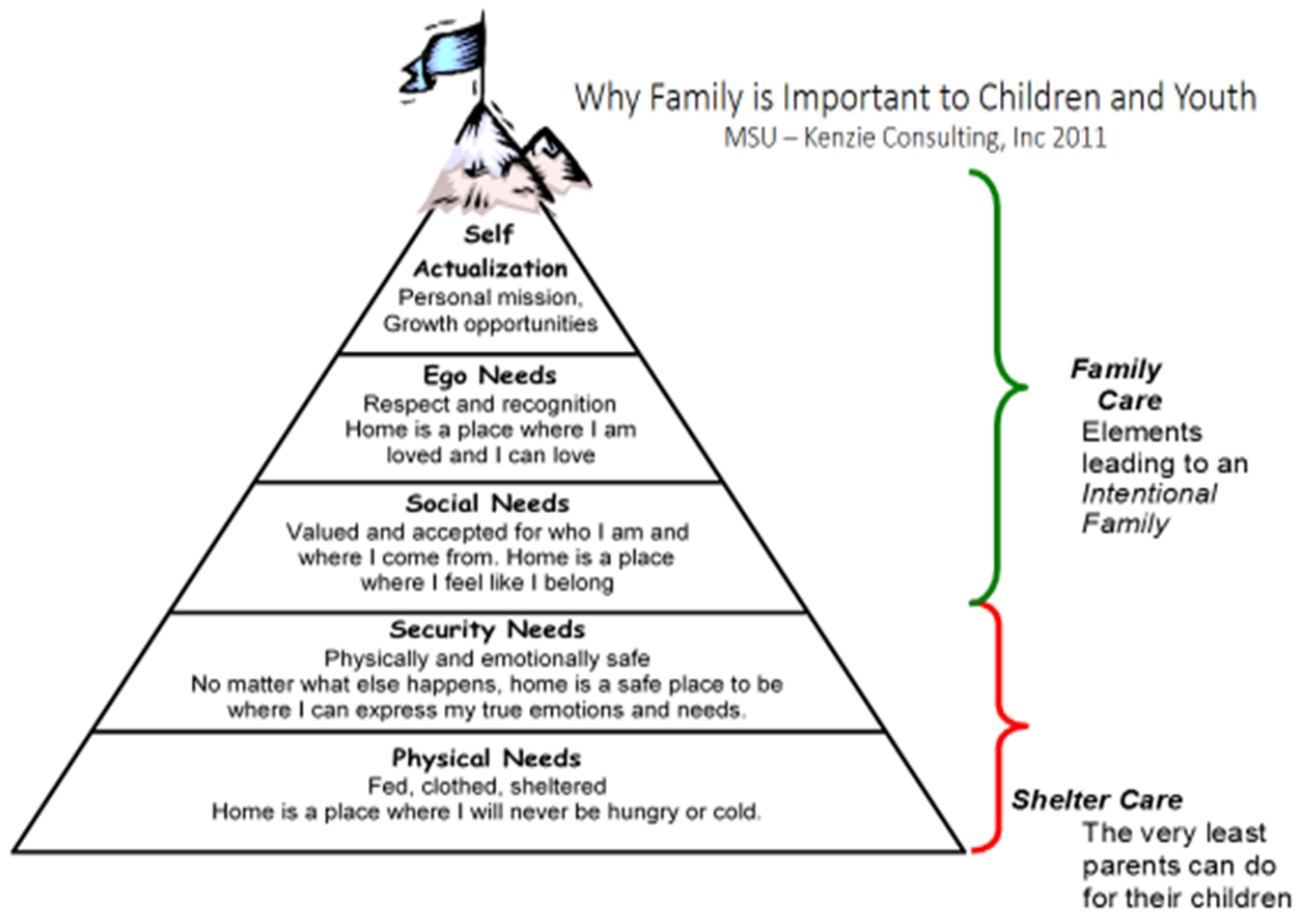
Tracy Kapusansky, PARC Program Manager

Family is the foundation from which every person starts to put together their thoughts on life. "Families provide love, support and a framework of values. Family is the single most important influence in a child's life. Family provides all members with security, identity and values, regardless of age. When a member of the family feels insecure or unsafe, he (typically) turns to his family for help." <https://usapho.org.za/reasons-why-family-important-life>

The diagram on the next page was published by Michigan State University in a training curriculum called "Building a Home with Heart" in 2011. This diagram replicates psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that was first published in 1943. This theory has shaped psychology and social work practice ever since. Maslow viewed the needs of humans as being hierarchical. Physiological needs (food, water, air) and safety needs (shelter, security) must be met before fulfilling the needs of belonging, esteem and self-actualization.

The MSU version shows why family is important in meeting children's basic needs and how our family life can enhance or inhibit our kids' emotional growth. The base level is where all humans must have their basic human needs met before they can move on to the next level. This is true for our children.

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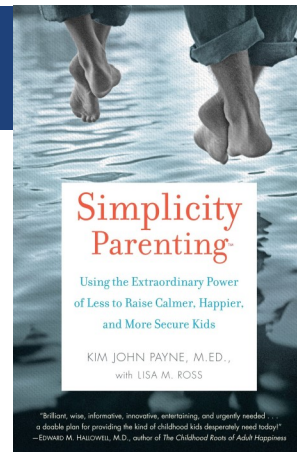


As parents, we often focus on our children’s behaviors and struggle with understanding why they behave the way they do. This chart illustrates the need to start with our children’s basic physical and security needs. Our kid’s need to know “home is a place I will never be hungry or cold and no matter what happens, home is a safe place to be where I can express my true emotions and needs.”

Sometimes the most well intentioned parents use threats of kicking their children out, having them stay with a relative, or sending them to a boarding school or treatment facility if they don’t change their behaviors. Many adopted or guardian children, who have already had their first home base disrupted, live in fear of their second home base not being secure either.

If you want to effect behaviors, start at the bottom. Make sure your child knows, 100% without a doubt, that they have a solid foundation. They have a home base. They don’t have to worry about where they are going to live, if they are going to have enough to eat or if they can be adequately clothed. Then encourage your child to express their true emotions, thoughts and feelings. You can help your child work through their frustrations and fears. You can provide understanding, empathy, encouragement, and hope. Ultimately, we want our kids to feel like “home is a place where I feel like I belong.”

As you move further up the chart, you can see this is where our children can start to feel better about themselves and will then treat others with kindness and compassion. They will start to feel like they are lovable, and in turn, will show love towards others. The challenging behaviors that were at one time difficult to understand, will most likely start to fade away.



I recently re-read a favorite book of mine, *Simplicity Parenting* by Kim John Payne, M. Ed. Although not specifically written for adoptive parents, this book really speaks to what both children and parents need. So often we are functioning under the burden of stress and exhaustion, and so are our children. There is so much to do and we want so much for our children. *Simplicity Parenting* outlines a way of living that is ultimately therapeutic for both parent and child. Each chapter describes a way of simplifying life, to remove stress and increase a sense of calm in our homes. The author uses stories and examples that are relatable to adoptive parents.

Mr. Payne has several methods he uses with his clients and he describes the effects it has had on creating happier, healthier families. His first method is to create simplicity in the child's physical environment at home. We've heard a lot recently about minimalism, and this follows that trend but goes far beyond it. Mr. Payne cites multiple studies and respected research on how this benefits children. He delves very specifically into how to weed out the chaos causing clutter, and choose the possessions which benefit children, rather than sabotaging family peace and mental health.

Another method is all about rhythm, schedules, "soul fever" and filtering out the adult world. The author offers practical examples of how busy families can create a daily rhythm in their home which is nurturing to the whole family. It's not an overwhelming prescription of things to do, but it's a helpful way to look at providing the gentle structure that benefits our children and decreases our stress as parents. Pieces of these ideas and this parenting method can be found in many other books and articles, but this book puts it all together in a way that is compelling and accessible.

The scheduling methods in the book helps us to examine the trap of busyness, for ourselves and our children, and how to create a schedule that serves our deepest needs, rather than running us ragged.

Information on soul fever explains how simplifying our children's lives in the ways the book discusses helps to quell the emotional storms our children experience at various times in their life, whether it's a bad day, or a painful season. This really speaks to the deep emotional challenges our adopted children face and how simplifying our family life is healing for them.

Filtering out the adult world is something I have observed affecting children in many families. Children suffer under the weight of a constant barrage of information and experiences that they don't have the developmental ability to process. This is particularly true of children with trauma histories or other special needs. It can tip the scales from their ability to cope with daily life, to the inability to cope, and the behaviors or mental health issues which follow.

Following the wisdom in this book is unlike that of other parenting books, in that it's not about using a method of discipline with our children. It's not about rules or reward charts that put the burden on the parent to do *more*, with a goal of *changing* our children. It's actually about doing less. Less running around, less worrying, less meeting other people's expectation or keeping up with the Jones'. Less stuff, less chaos, less pressure. And the result is better connection, better quality family time, calmer and more secure children and more confident parents.

I recommend this book for every parent, including those with children who have multiple diagnoses. The author states that ADHD, ODD, DMD, BPD, SPD, ASD, OCD, SPD, among others, can all be helped by *Simplicity Parenting*. As parents, we know there is no magic cure for healing our struggling children and families. I read every parenting book I can get my hands on, to glean any new bit of wisdom or practical suggestion. If you only read one book on parenting or family life this year, I recommend that it be *Simplicity Parenting*.

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- **Do you treat each child as an individual?** Each child has his own temperament, his own way of viewing and interacting with the world around him. Parents may love their children equally, but naturally will have different sorts of relationships with each of them. Individualize your relationship with each of your children, reinforcing their strengths and talents and avoiding making unflattering comparisons with their siblings or friends.
- **Does your family have regular routines?** Children and parents benefit from having some predictable day-to-day routines. Morning schedules, mealtimes and bedtimes are easier for everyone when they follow a pattern. Children also appreciate family rituals and traditions around birthdays, holidays and vacations.
- **Is your family an active participant in your extended family and the community?** Families work better when they feel connected and supported by friends and relatives. Usually such relationships require that parents make an active effort to get together with others socially or for civic projects.
- **Are your expectations of yourself and other family members realistic?** Your child's self-awareness, knowledge and skills are constantly changing. Observe, read and talk to others to learn what can reasonably be expected of your child at each stage of development. Parents, too, have limitations on what they can accomplish, given their resources and the time available. There are no "superparents," just individuals doing their best.
- **Does the time you spend with your family members contribute to good relationships among you?** Most of the time you and your child and your spouse spend together should be fun, relaxed, meaningful and relatively conflict-free.
- **As a parent, singly or as a couple, are you taking care of your own needs?** You should be leading a healthy personal life (including proper diet, exercise and sleep habits). Set aside time, however brief, for things you enjoy. Your children will thrive when your own emotional needs are being met. They do best when they are reared by parents who are in a harmonious relationship with each other.
- **Do you take moral and social responsibility for your own life?** You are the most important role model for your child. Demonstrate your value system through actions as well as words.



Having a basic understanding of what triggers children to misbehave will help keep homes happy and safe. One basic understanding is that children (and adults too) will misbehave when they are hungry, angry, lonely/bored or tired (HALT). People will not have as much tolerance and be more irritable when they are hungry, angry or not feeling well. If you or your children are experiencing any of these emotions or feelings halt what you are doing and tend to that need before moving on.

Another reason why children misbehave is that they may not fully understand the request. For an example, if you ask the child to calm down they may not understand what you mean and how to actually calm themselves. This is also an example of a lack of experience. Children do not have the experiences that adults have. It takes time for a child to fully develop problem solving and communication skills.

The practice of mindfulness can teach children and adults how to calm their minds and bodies to find a feeling of balance or confidence. Mindfulness is a practice of paying attention to your senses in the current moment without judgement. It is about being present and acknowledging the moment to moment experiences. Mindfulness helps develop focus and self regulation. When practiced regularly, the events that require acute attention will be less stressful because your body and mind have been conditioned to work together in paying attention.

Another reason children may misbehave is because their behaviors are accidentally rewarded by adults. An example is when children wait to do something an adult asks of them until the adults tone of voice increases or that crying and whining gets a parents attention. Children also copy what they see others doing.

Sometimes children do things they know are wrong such as testing the rules, and showing independence. Nobody likes to be told what to do all the time and not have any choices. Children are learning how to do many things at a fast rate and they need to be able to show off what they have learned or can do.

When you or your children are showing one or more of these seven triggers, be mindful and acknowledge what you notice in a tone that will teach, guide and train your children.

- Hunger, anger, lonely/bored, tired or sickness
- Don't understand the rules
- Lack of experience
- Misbehavior was accidentally rewarded
- Testing the rules
- Copying others
- Showing independence



Region 5 Meetings and Support Groups

Build connections with and get support from others who truly understand!

Monthly Support Group:

Fabulous Foster and Adoptive Families

For parents and youth! Teen and Pre-teens may join the PARC Youth Group or join in the activities provided for younger children.

When: First Monday of each month

Time: 6 - 8 p.m.

Location: 2/42 Community Center 648 S. Wagner Rd.
Ann Arbor MI 48103

Group starts with a potluck; please bring a dish to pass if you are able. RSVP to
Jane_argiero@judsoncenter.org
or call 517-937-7580



Upcoming trainings and conferences:

Trainings:

February 23, 2019– Black Skin and Hair Care in Kalamazoo

May 1, 2019—Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in Ann Arbor

June 29, 2019– IEP/ Special Education Advocacy in Kalamazoo

Conferences:

February 23, 2019 in Lenawee county

March 2, 2019 in Fenton (Genesee County)

August 2, 2019 in Rives Junction (Jackson County)

Video Simulcast:

April 5-6, 2019 Empowered to Connect in several locations TBD



For a complete list of events, visit the calendar page on our website. Additional activities and resources are listed there as well!

<http://www.parc-judson.org/calendar>



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